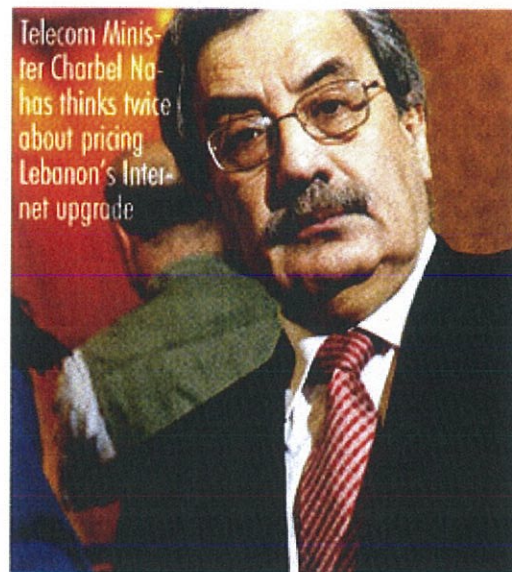


Broadband lumbers forward

Telecommunications Minister Charbel Nahas said last month that the project to develop a national fiber-optic network to increase Internet speeds in Lebanon will cost \$92.9 million. The announcement was made at a conference on April 12, after the minister had announced in January that the project would cost some \$166 million. In March, EXECUTIVE cited telecommunications experts at the International Telecommunications Union, the United Nations agency for telecommunications, as stating that the project should cost no more than \$40 million. Speaking at the conference, Nahas said that \$66.3 million had been requested from the Council of Ministers, Lebanon's cabinet, to start funding the project. The figure is close to the previous minister's estimate of \$64 million to implement the project. Lebanon is still in the process of passing a budget for the year, before which new projects cannot be funded from government coffers. According to Naji Andraos, director general of construction and maintenance, the project requires some 4,000 kilometers of fiber optic cable, most of which will be laid in two "super rings" that will carry the bulk of the data around Lebanon to be transferred to "metro rings" in population areas. The "access layer," the final crucial link between telecommunications infrastructure and the user, is still being studied by the ministry, which hopes to finish its assessment by mid-2011, according to Abdulmenaim Youssef, the head of Lebanon's incumbent public operator, Ogero. Youssef also heads the Directorate of Operations and Maintenance at the Ministry of Telecommunications, whose job it is to oversee Ogero's operations. Without defining the access layer, an accurate financial estimate of how much the project will cost is near impossible. "The tender for the optical backbone and the metro backbone is still in the planning phase," said Anders Lindblad, president of Ericsson in the Middle East. "Sure there is a budgetary estimate, but the competition [in the vendor market] will determine the price." He added that the project will likely take 10 to 15 years to complete. In related telecom news, Kamal Shehadi, the chairman of Lebanon's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), has resigned, according to a TRA press release dated April 26.



Telecom Minister Charbel Nahas thinks twice about pricing Lebanon's Internet upgrade